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*GREAVES, WHISTLER,
AND CHELSEA.*

A PERSONAL NOTE.

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157, King's Road,
Chelsea.*

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SMITHSONIAN
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WALTER GREAVES AT THE CARLYLE STATUE.

May 23rd, 1911.

GREAVES, WHISTLER & CHELSEA.

A PERSONAL NOTE.

*WEST LONDON BOOK STORE,
157, King's Road,
Chelsea.*

June, 1911.

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To

WALTER T. SPENCER

whose long-practised appreciation
of the works of literary and artistic
genius played no mean part in Great Britain and
America towards the preservation to
posterity of the paintings of

WALTER GREAVES.

∴

*"Go, little book, and wish to all,
Flowers in the garden, meat in the hall, . . .
A living river by the door,
A nightingale in the sycamore."*

R. L. STEVENSON.



J. A. McNEILL WHISTLER. BY WALTER GREAVES.

From an original oil painting in the possession of Mr. W. T. Spencer

GREAVES, WHISTLER & CHELSEA.

AN added interest, though more may not be needed, will be given to the works and criticisms of James McNeill Whistler, in the exhibition at the Goupil Gallery of a series of early works by Mr. Walter Greaves, pupil of Whistler. The fine distinctions of depreciation and admiration have involved the name of Whistler through every stage and degree between the charlatan and the immortal master. Whistler's own estimates we know, and there are still with us those who remember pleasantly his "Ten o'clock." But his vivacious egotism was not imparted to his pupil. Mr. Greaves may be said to court obscurity rather than fame. His work has been his whole ambition. For half a century he has delighted in depicting the old Chelsea scenes in the highways and byways. Not the Chelsea of to-day, but that of the fast disappearing "village of palaces." No. 10, Lindsey Row, in which house Mr. Greaves was born, derived its name from a palace of the past. In his earliest youth he was fascinated by the old-world glories, and the picturesqueness of the riverside. Now he has

a fund of reminiscences of "the old friends, the long nights, the twilights red and grey," though there is little left, we may presume, to remind him of the old times, but the "lights of Chelsea River that glisten in the rain." These indeed afford still, in some fashion, rapture and enthusiasm to a younger and sterner generation of artists.

The father of Walter Greaves was a neighbour of J. M. W. Turner's, a prosperous boat-builder, whom that eminent and eccentric artist had often occasion to consult. To the artist the weather has always been an important consideration, and Turner's river excursions were not uninfluenced by the weatherwise notions of the elder Greaves. Turner would shout to Mrs. Booth, "I shall not be long gone. Greaves says the weather will be soupy." Walter Greaves remembers Mrs. Booth, but Turner was before his time. His present-day interest in art and Chelsea begins with his early conceived ideas of depicting the Chelsea of his day, which was before the advent of Whistler. This gives colour to a recent exclamation of an admirer of his work, who said, "Ah, but do not tell me you were a pupil of Whistler's; Whistler was a pupil of yours!"

It was at No. 7, Lindsey Row that Mr. Greaves first remembers the Mr. Whistler, the "Japanese artist" of that day. His first recollection is of Whistler seated in his window painting Battersea Bridge. Walter Greaves



LINDSEY ROW, CHEYNE WALK, CHELSEA.

The entrance to Whistler's house is opposite the lamp in the foreground.

and his brother Harry had both achieved some local repute as artists, and common affinity led Walter to Whistler's studio where the master was not slow to recognise time, person, and place. Henceforth Walter Greaves was intimately associated with the artist whose ultimate fame was so long in jeopardy. To-day it seems hardly credible that small tradesmen should have shown reluctance to accept a few paintings by Whistler in liquidation of a moderate debt—but art is proverbially long, and the remembrance is not pleasant.

From No. 7, Lindsey Row Whistler removed to No. 2, where he painted the famous picture of his mother. Mr. Greaves remembers this saintly lady, who lived in the uppermost room of the house. She was a marvellous woman, and in age retained those qualities ensuring lasting veneration. Upon occasion her letters to Mr. Greaves were full of human interest and tender solicitation for her son.

Whistler's interest in Walter Greaves never flagged. The master advised him to follow his own initiative, to abstain from the influence of schools and from the usual trammels of art. This did not preclude attendance with Whistler at a school in Limerston Street, where both Greaves and Whistler made many studies from life. The drawings from the nude, in chalk upon brown paper, long a favourite medium of Walter Greaves, were con-

tinued by Greaves and Whistler together, the latter often lending assistance. In such converse an intimacy was cultivated which rendered Greaves an invaluable assistant and pupil to the great artist. Greaves became an essential. He accompanied Whistler down the river to Wapping, and up the river to Putney. He shared Whistler's greetings of the dawn, and his nocturnal revels at and after Cremorne. He studied from the same models, and received Whistler's corrections and commendations. He helped him at the Peacock Room. He was invited by Whistler to accompany him to Venice.

Thomas Carlyle is a great name, and nowhere more than in Chelsea. Amongst the few who remember his striking personality is Walter Greaves, whose uncle leased a meadow at the back of Carlyle's house. The boy Greaves in an evil moment sent a stone through Carlyle's window. We leave the sequence to the imagination! Carlyle came out. But Greaves got clear of him; and even now he is glad in the escape. Escapades with his uncle's ponies, a boat truck, and girls, also add to his own delectation, and we fear may have added to Carlyle's moroseness.

Carlyle was well known in the Chelsea of Greaves's day. Loafers would say, "Here is Carlyle, let's make him talk." Their greeting of "A fine morning, Mr. Carlyle!" would but elicit the surly response, "Tell me

something I don't know ! " Greaves often saw Carlyle upon the occasions of his visits to Whistler's studio, while the famous portrait was in progress. Then he had ample time to observe him. " This is a house to grow fat in," said Carlyle, upon one occasion, but Whistler never laid much store by the connection with that eminent philosopher. More pleasant reminiscences belong to the period when Leigh Hunt hurried round from his house in Upper Cheyne Row near by, in order to impart first-hand the news of the Carlyle pension. Greaves has no recollection of ever seeing Mrs. Carlyle, but Leigh Hunt's news of the pension called one of the prettiest poems in the world into existence :

“ Jenny kissed me when we met,
Jumping from the chair she sat in ;
Time, you thief, who love to get
Sweets into your list, put that in !
Say I'm weary, say I'm sad,
Say that health and wealth have missed me,
Say I'm growing old, but add,
Jenny kissed me.”

Chelsea has changed from all that it used to be. Walter Greaves has love for the home of his birth, and in his drawings, paintings and etchings we see Chelsea as he saw it. Many of the old landmarks are gone and many

of the old faces. The days of Cremorne are over, and the most modern writer on the subject has given Greaves the place of honour as an illustrator of the old-time pleasure garden. The attractions of those days can never come again. In these days of aviation a Female Blondin would pall. In 1862 the stretching of a rope from Chelsea to Battersea, the initiative of an E. T. Smith, and the glories of Cremorne, the Female Blondin, and the youth of the world, were sufficient to draw the heads of crowds that one might walk upon. Boats on the river, steamboats on the river, and such a concourse that the publicans were sold out. All this for the Female Blondin in 1862. "E'en such is time." Greaves's father looked askance at Turner's sketches, and we look askance at Female Blondins. Whistler has risen to fame and posthumous prices. Mr. Greaves is well aware of the sale-room recognition of the work of his master. At D. G. Rossetti's sale he bought a small etching of an old woman sitting at the end of a passage. The price he paid was 14s. The Whistler's etching of Billingsgate he was wanting at a sovereign, but it went beyond him—to £5. That was Rossetti's sale, of which many stories are told! The Whistler etchings are now known and valued. The reason is not far to seek. Whistler was, in Greaves's opinion, the most expert of printers of etchings. The quality of an etching varies



THOMAS CARLYLE. BY WALTER GREAVES.
From an original painting in the possession of Mr. W. T. Spencer.

considerably in consequence of the failure to grasp the essential details of printing. In short, no one could print Whistler's etchings as he could print them himself. This means everything! It is the last word in Whistlerian values!

By the side of the river he loved we sought the last resting-place of the master. Sunlight, a rosebush, a mound, and peacock blue. Said one, "A nameless grave!" "Yet," said Greaves, "it is his way. He would say, 'Let all who want me find me!'"

The foregoing notice of Mr. Greaves, with all those imperfections of composition which render it of no service to Pressmen, is given here as the earliest appreciation of Walter Greaves. It was written on Wednesday, May the 3rd, before the writer had seen the interesting catalogue at the Goupil Gallery. The writer's first impressions of the exhibition were those of amazement and admiration. He had long been familiar with some of the paintings and etchings of Mr. Greaves, but had not even dreamed of the existence of such a collection. Topographically it was a revelation. Long familiarity with views of old London did not outweigh the conviction that here, in the works of Walter Greaves, were scenes to add in perpetual remembrance. Furthermore, one beheld a harmony of colour, a play of artistic arrangement, yet nothing to outrage the imagination.

Here was Chelsea of an earlier day, Chelsea as Greaves was born in it, and as Whistler found it. One's first thoughts were of the artist who lived and loved and laboured, and next of Mr. Marchant who had accomplished so much towards preserving the artist's name. There was a Whistlerian air in the rooms; how would the critics breathe it? One remembers Whistler's waspish, witty antagonism, but Walter Greaves has thrown no challenge to the world. He stands behind his work and practises a modest self-effacement in the shadow of a great name. He has no cord at the critics' service. He has received a chorus of praise.

The writer of these lines will never forget the pleasure he had in reading to the artist on the morning of May the 5th, 1911, the article in that day's *Times*. "They call me an 'unknown master,'" said Mr. Greaves, "but I've been known in Chelsea all my life!" There is love of home in such meaning words as these. Walter Greaves is a man of the people. The wider life he has never sought; it has found him. The way fame has come to him without stirring his inborn manliness is Nature's marvel and the attribute of greatness. The *Times* critic struck the right note. It has been endorsed again and again. So far as I can discover it has been the lot of but one critic to indulge in the unenviable distinction of plunging into what one might call an amazing



WALTER GREAVES'S BIRTHPLACE.

Now 104 Cheyne Walk, formerly No. 10, Lindsey Row.

orgy in a pamphagonia of cynical dissension. There we will leave it. The pictures remain.

The personal story of Walter Greaves calls forth every feeling of brotherhood in man. Year in, year out he has worked unceasingly. His soul is in his pictures. For the commercial, the business side of life he has had no regard. He has accepted the estimates of others, which until very recently have been neither appreciative nor generous. His character has stood the test of long days of struggle and adversity. Uncomplainingly and unflinchingly he has breasted the wave, till at last he has emerged upon the far shore of public acclaim. The pictures and etchings exhibited form a great achievement for one man, yet these are but a small part of all he has done. He laid the foundation of a good beginning. He has endured through a long and strenuous career. He can look to the years that are gone and forward to years to come. A modern Janus, we must see that the key is still in his hand.

In those glad days of fame and acclaim Walter Greaves did not forget the people amongst whom he had moved. His long-familiar figure bears an added dignity of triumph, but his heart in its simplicity is still the same. It was a proud moment to the present writer when together we paid a long-promised visit to a friend at 27, New Oxford Street. There Walter Greaves sat and

talked in the little book-lined room where Stevenson, Gladstone, Pater, Swinburne and other famous men had sat and talked before him. Not one of them left a greater impression of a man of striking personality and inborn dignity. Universal homage could not undermine his simplicity of manner, and such a man is worthy of all the honour his contemporaries can bestow.

W. B.

*" Yet though all this be thus
Be those men praised of us
Who have loved and wrought and sorrowed and not sinned
For fame or fear of gold,
Nor waxed for winter cold,
Nor changed for changes of the worldly wind ;
Praised above men of men be these,
Till this one world and work we know shall cease."*

A. C. SWINBURNE.

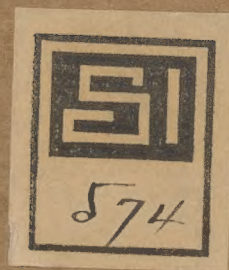
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ALBERT LODGE, FULHAM ROAD.

Mr. Greaves's former residence, from whence came the now famous pictures.



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